

27-06-2021 4th Sunday after Trinity

Readings:

Lamentations 3:22-33

Mark 5:21-43

Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

The story in Mark's Gospel of the woman with a haemorrhage and the one of Jairus' daughter are two of four miracles in this section of the Gospel. The first miracle was the text we read last week about Jesus calming the storm; that story is followed by the healing of the Gerasene demoniacs. The first one shows Jesus' power over nature; the second one shows his power over demons, over evil. The third and fourth miracle we saw today; they demonstrate the power of Jesus over sickness and death. It is all about his power to bring salvation even to hopeless situations.

The story of the woman with a haemorrhage demonstrates great faith on the part of a woman who had tried every remedy possible. It would have been understandable if she would have given up and lost all hope. But she didn't give up, she persisted in faith.

The story of Jairus and his daughter demonstrates great faith on the part of a religious leader, clearly part of the establishment; most of his fellow leaders were opposing Jesus, but not Jairus; he comes to Jesus as a believer.

It cannot be a coincidence that Mark presents these stories the way he does: as a story within a story. The stories belong together. Mark creates dramatic tension by telling the two stories together the way he does.

The stories show how Jesus deals with people of vastly different standing: Jairus is a well off man with a position of social standing and influence. The woman with the haemorrhage is financially impoverished and socially an outcast. But no matter their position, Jesus deals with them in the same way: he doesn't judge or favour one over the other.

Jesus responds to Jairus' call for help and they are on the way to his house to heal the girl as the woman comes into the story. I can imagine Jairus getting impatient. What would the delay mean to his little girl? But Jesus takes his time for the woman. He proclaims that her faith has healed her, Jesus obviously being the Lord of Salvation. Meanwhile Jairus is still waiting and his servants come to him bringing him the message that his daughter has passed away. This must have been devastating for Jairus, but Jesus tells him not to fear, but to keep believing. And apparently he does and walks with Jesus to his house.

Arriving there Jesus is mocked by the people when he says that the girl is only sleeping. He makes the mourners silent.

And as in so many other stories Jesus ignores the Jewish rules. These two stories involve issues of ritual uncleanness: the woman is unclean because of her haemorrhage; still she touches Jesus and the miracle happens. The little girl was dead and dead bodies were unclean and could not be touched; but Jesus takes her hand and calls her back to life. Jesus does the

unexpected: normally anyone who would touch either the woman or the girl would be rendered unclean by that touch; but for Jesus this rule is less important than healing the woman and calling the girl back to life; salvation is more important than man made rules. The stories of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the haemorrhage are not just healing stories, but typically salvation stories as well.

And what is behind this salvation? What makes it so obvious that Jesus can and will heal in these stories?

That becomes clear in verse 34 where Jesus says: 'Daughter, your faith has made you well'. Faith is the element that makes it all happen.

And when Jairus gets the message that his little girl has already died, Jesus says to him: 'Do not fear, only believe'.

Believing, faith is essential. The woman, after twelve years of seeing doctors, her situation being humanly impossible, still believes that touching even the hem of his robe, will heal her. And Jairus: although many of his colleagues in the synagogue establishment were against Jesus, Jairus believes that Jesus has the power to help him. And even as his situation grows from bad to worse, instead of his child being ill, now she is dead; but he keeps his faith as Jesus encourages him.

Faith is a key-component in both of these stories.

Following today's story is the story of Jesus in his home town Nazareth. There the Gospel says that Jesus couldn't do much because their lack of faith. Jesus can do much when we believe, when we have faith; but he cannot when we lack faith.

Faith is what really matters. The woman and Jairus turned to Jesus because of faith: they believed he was able to help them, even when there was enough reason to do otherwise: the woman struggled for twelve years; nobody was able to help her. Jairus got the message that it was all over, his little girl was dead. But both of them hang on to their faith, a faith that is life-changing.

Jesus' life, his public ministry and in the end his death grant life-changing healing. Jesus ignores the rules and the Jewish Law and heals the woman and the girl. Jesus crosses boundaries; he chooses not to leave people in the conditions in which he finds them and he has the power to alter these conditions. He heals people, even if he has to touch an unclean woman or even a corpse to do so. Even if he has to do the unexpected or even the unlawful. Establishing the Kingdom of God is more important than keeping the Law.

What about us? How do we act? What do we do?

Can we as Christians, as Christian community alter the conditions of people's lives? Can we too bring healing into troubled circumstances? Must we not also cross boundaries, whatever boundaries are in front of us? Think of boundaries related to ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, politics or any other boundaries that divide our society. Must we not, instead of affirming these boundaries, advocate life-giving meaning and change? Jesus gave back life to the woman and the girl; must we not too?

May God grant us the courage to do so!

Let us have faith and the courage to change the world.